



# City of Newburgh

## Office of the City Manager

Jean-Ann McGrane, Esq., M.S.  
City Manager  
Tel. (845) 569-7301

City Hall – 83 Broadway  
Newburgh, New York 12550  
Fax (845) 569-7370

E-mail: [jmcgrane@cityofnewburgh-ny.gov](mailto:jmcgrane@cityofnewburgh-ny.gov)

### **MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Courthouse Burial Ground Working Group

**FROM:** Ann Kuzmik, Administrative Assistant to the City Manager

**RE:** Courthouse Burial Ground;  
Meeting of Nov. 3, 2008 Summary of Comments

**DATE:** Nov. 21, 2008

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#### **Attendees:**

City Manager Jean-Ann McGrane  
Doug Mackey, SHPPO  
Mary McTamaney, City Historian  
Dr. Benilda Armstead Jones, Black Ministerial Fellowship  
Decora, Newburgh Arts & Cultural Commission  
Dirk Marcucci, Landmark Archeology  
Richard Peterson  
Steve Ruelke, City Assessor  
Dr. Ken Nystrom, SUNY New Paltz  
Otis C. Dees, A.M.E. Zion Church  
Ed McCarthy, Hudson Valley Press  
Pamela Krizek, St. Mary's Parish/NECSD  
Yaniyah Pearson, City of Newburgh Director of Human Services  
Cynthia Fountain, Miles of Smiles  
Ann Kuzmik, City of Newburgh

#### **I. REPORT FROM ARCHEOLOGIST**

- Dirk Marcucci of Landmark Archeology presented a final summary of the excavations which are now complete. He reviewed the work that followed the discovery of the first human remains in late March, until its conclusion in late September.

- The initial discovery of remains in the parking lot near the back entrance to the former school prompted a police investigation. When it was determined that the site was a historical cemetery, the Council passed a resolution providing for an archeologist to be on site during further construction, and Landmark Archeology was chosen.
- In order to expedite the recovery process, they divided the work site into zones. Work began in Zone 1, just west of the area where the first remains were found. In Zone 1, rows of graves were found, as well as a large gas pipe and a buried oil barrel. In the area of the retaining wall, Zone 1C, remains were found, including some children's graves near the fence.
- In Zone 2, the future "sallyport" area, none were found. In Zone 3:10, the sidewalk alongside Robinson Avenue, Landmark monitored as the water department began work. The remains of a child turned up, and work stopped until the area could be further investigated, and any remains removed. Dirk Marcucci stated that there is no reason to think that graves do not continue under Robinson Avenue. There is also evidence that graves are still under the Broadway School.
- The southwest quadrant of Zone 3 was not investigated. This area may be considered for the memorial. Remains were found in other parts of Zone 3, as was an oil barrel and a large gas pipe.

In all, the remains of 106 individuals were found. With the exception of one grave, all the graves faced east toward the sun, as was customary, and burials were in rows.

- In addition to brass buttons, other artifacts found included the remnants of a tombstone, some coffin wood, a ring and earring, coins dating back to 1832, a coin purse with 13 cents inside, and a clay pipe. One male had a piece of a leather coat preserved on his arm with copper buttons.
- It appears that the cemetery was in use from approximately 1820-1860. The graves follow the contour of the hill, indicating that the land formation was similar in the days of the cemetery as it is today. Investigation of the remains indicates that they were African American; there is no evidence of Native American burials, Marcucci said.

## **II. DISCUSSION BY DR. KENNETH NYSTROM, Anthropology Professor, SUNY New Paltz**

- All but the first sets of remains, about a dozen, were sent to the New York State Museum. All remains will eventually be returned to SUNY. Initial research involves population demographics, general health, and specific disease processes.

Dr. Nystrom commented that Landmark Archeology did “an incredible job” handling the remains.

- Several juveniles were among those examined. From dental examination, diet and overall health can be determined. Enamel on teeth is like tree rings- the growth pattern is different in bad years. Some skeletal remains showed signs of ankylosing spondylitis, inflammation, and congenital syphilis.

### **III. GENERAL DISCUSSION**

#### **Time Frame & Level of Examination**

- The time frame for examination of the remains will be determined by SHPPO, Dr. Nystrom said. Doug Mackey, of the New York State Historic Preservation Office (SHPPO) noted that Level 1, or basic examination, (age, general health, population demographic) could take up to a year. SHPPO wants some historical research to come out of the studies. Dr. Nystrom said that he is doing just the basic study at this time, but more could be done. It will take about 1 year to do the basic research; the group can decide in the interim what level to do after that.
- Dick Peterson noted that there are other spiritual and moral considerations about how long to study the remains of these people, saying “They aren’t dinosaurs.” He would like the shorter study rather than the longer.
- The agency or company who will do the examination of the remains has not been determined as yet- there was some discussion of options.

#### **Significance of Newburgh’s burial ground**

- These individuals represent a unique point in history for the Mid Hudson Valley- an African American Burial Ground in a northern state, where there are very few of these cemeteries. There was a very high rate of free African Americans in the Newburgh area.

### **III. CONSTRUCTION UPDATE**

- City Manager Jean-Ann McGrane commented that construction on the outside of the courthouse is almost done; the inside should be finished early next year.
- Initial plans are to put the memorial park in the front of the building on the Broadway side. Funding needs to be secured, so re-interment could likely not occur until a year from next spring- thus, plans for the park are on a parallel track with the time frame for initial examination of remains.

- When Robinson Avenue construction begins- it is likely that more remains will be found under the street. Consensus of the group is that they should not be left there.
- Any plan for the re-interment will need to be flexible, and the memorial needs to allow for additional remains if more are discovered over the years
- The City needs to have “guardianship” of the remains. A contract needs to be drafted and signed between Newburgh and SUNY New Paltz and a council resolution passed to accept that contract.

#### **IV. REPORT FROM COMMEMORATION COMMITTEE**

- The group has met about four times- they are discussing what story the memorials inside and outside the courthouse will tell. Language will be used to indicate that what happened on the cemetery site was an injustice that will never happen again.
- Kendal Henry, City Cultural and Economic Director contacted Rodney Lyons, who helped design the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City, and who is willing to do a presentation that will help re-channel the grief, loss, and division into the healing process. This may be an opportunity for a community forum.
- The group consensus appears to be that the forum should be a presentation by the committees of what has been done to date and how they would recommend proceeding, with explanation of why those options were chosen.
- Members of the committee expressed an interest in going to New York City to see the Monument at Foley Square.

#### **IV: NEXT STEPS:**

- The next meeting of the Advisory Group as a whole will be set after the Commemoration Committee visits the memorial in New York City
- The Advisory Group would like to go forward with nominating the Burial Ground site to the National Register of Historic Places

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Kuzmik  
Administrative Assistant to the City Manager